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Only a few know Carter's real intent

This is the second in a series of controversial columns by Jack Anderson, claiming President Carter has developed a secret plan to invade Iran on the eve of the November election. The White House has categorically denied the existence of such a plan.

On January 8, Jimmy Carter was asked at a news conference about rescuing the American hostages from their Iranian kidnappers. A military rescue, he warned, "would almost certainly end in failure and almost certainly end in the death of the hostages." This was the assessment, indeed, of the military experts.

Then the president's popularity began to plunge in the polls. The public mood, as charted by the polls, indicated that he could lose several crucial presidential primaries to challenger Ted Kennedy. A major complaint against the long-suffering Carter, the polls also showed, was his tendency to mope about the hostage crisis rather than do something about it.

So he ordered a military rescue attempt. Sources who helped plan the April mission believe Carter was more concerned about his own political fate than the fate of the hostages.

The mission, as Americans are painfully aware, turned out to be a fiasco.

Now once again, the president's re-election is in jeopardy. He is lagging behind Republican candidate Ronald Reagan in the polls. Unfortunately for the besieged Carter, election day will fall on the anniversary of the hostage seizure. This will remind the voters forcefully of the hostage horror as they are going to the polls.

If it appears that he has mishandled the problem, they might express their displeasure on the ballots. Conversely, political studies show that Americans have always rallied around their president during a national emergency.

It is against this background that Jimmy Carter has ordered preparations for a limited invasion of Iran. For planning purposes, D-Day has been set in October on the eve of the election. Troubled planners suspect that Carter has been guided more by his political studies than their military assessments.

It has taken my associate Dale Van Atta three months to piece together the elusive, secret details because, in the name of national security, the invasion plan has been carefully disguised.

Deceptive cover plans and alternate plans have been devised to mislead the thousands of people who necessarily must prepare for any major military operation. Even some of the top tacticians, who meet "Behind the Green Door" as the entrance to the Pentagon operations room is sometimes called, are ignorant of the final plan.

The alternate plans have interlocking elements, which would explain the military preparations without betraying their true purpose. For example, the Saudi Arabian rulers are so worried about an Iranian-style revolt that they have asked for U.S. military support in case the royal family comes under siege.

President Carter has secretly agreed to the request, and some planners have been told this is the reason for all the military activity in the Persian Gulf. Other cover stories have been invented about stand-by forces and training exercises.

But documents so secret that even the classification stamp is classified, identify Carter's real target as Iran. Sources familiar with these documents fear that the limited invasion Carter favors could ignite into a major war. The ostensible objective of saving the hostages, they add, is not likely to be achieved.

Of course, the president can always call off the invasion plan and pretend it never existed.

Jack Anderson is a syndicated investigative reporter.